

# your health

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## Holidays Don't Have to Make You Heavier

The holiday season is always extra challenging for those watching their weight, but there are ways to participate in the fun without packing on the pounds.

Julie Redfern, manager of the Nutrition Consult Services at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, recommends trying to simply maintain your weight rather than shedding pounds as a good strategy. In a news release issued by the hospital, she also offered these tips:

- Before going to a holiday party, eat a light snack. Arriving hungry often results in overindulging. Also, offer to bring your favorite healthier choice dish to ensure that you have good food options.
- Don't hang out near the food. Proximity increases temptation.
- Practice good portion control. Fill your dinner plate with half vegetables, a quarter protein and a quarter carbs. Try to avoid seconds and thirds. As for desserts, choose only those you like the most and have smaller portions.

- Reduce your fat intake by skipping the skin on turkey or chicken. Also, refrigerate gravy, then skim off the fat once it cools.
- Watch out for high-calorie holiday drinks. Enjoy just a small cup of apple cider, eggnog or the like, then balance it off with lots of water to help curb your appetite.
- Eat once, not all night. Grazing at the food table quickly piles up the calories, so instead, make a balanced plate of food just once during a party.
- When hosting a holiday party, give away your leftovers. Keep plenty of disposable dishes ready to give away sweets and other unhealthy food choices to guests.
- Focus on conversation or activities with your family and friends, rather than on food. For example, take a family walk after the main holiday meal.

### More information

The American Dietetic Association has more about healthy eating,  
<http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/index.html>.

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## Avoiding a Holiday Season of Discontent

For many people, stress is as much a part of the holiday season as family gatherings and good food.

But learning the art of relaxation can help relieve social, financial and other pressures that can take the fun out of this time of year, according to Julie Kosey, manager of integrative health coaching at Duke Integrative Medicine.

'Relaxation is a right, not a privilege,' Kosey said in a Duke news release. If you don't learn to relax, she added, stress could take a toll on your personal and professional relationships, health, productivity and overall well-being.

Respecting your personal needs is an important part of mastering relaxation, said Kosey, who offered the following tips:

- **Visualize your ideal holiday.** This includes deciding ahead of time which invitations suit your needs and those that don't fit the bill. Don't be afraid to re-evaluate family traditions and start some new ones.
- **Define what relaxation means to you.** It could be taking a bubble bath, going for a long walk, working out in the gym, or recharging your batteries with your family.

'No matter what your age, people need to play and have something in their life that's enjoyable,' Kosey said.

- **Schedule down time.** Learn how to enjoy being alone with yourself and/or with your family. Turn off cell phones, computers and play board game, read a book, draw a picture.
- **Be realistic.** For example, if you're not the type to do yoga, you probably won't stay at it for very long. Identify what relaxation methods worked best for you in the past and try them. It may be the best way to maintain your motivation to relax.
- **Recognize when you're experiencing too much stress,** such as in the form of headaches, insomnia or disagreements with family, friends or co-workers. If you're feeling stressed at work, get some fresh air. At home, step out on the porch. 'Even if you have five minutes, do a series of deep inhales and exhailes, or visualize a place you'd like to be,' Kosey said. 'Take a walk or call a friend. A lot can be done in a short amount of time to keep stress at bay.'
- **Keep focused on your goal.** If you're not convinced it's important to relax, you may not take the steps needed to do it. Determine how relaxation will benefit you -- such as lowering blood pressure -- and concentrate on that reward.

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# Go Green This Holiday Season

**Don't let holiday stress crowd out your good intentions. Here are some ways to stay "green" through the season of giving.**

No doubt you have good intentions. You're probably using compact-fluorescent light bulbs. You try to remember to "reduce, reuse, recycle." But when the holidays come, it's easy to fall back into old habits and forget about being green.

It's even more important to make green choices during the holiday season. An estimated one million tons of extra garbage is produced in the U.S. each week between Thanksgiving and New Year's. You can do your part to cut the waste, and you may even save money. Now that's something to celebrate.

## 8 Tips for Greener Holidays

1. **Take your own bags.** Get some sturdy canvas, mesh or nylon shopping bags and take them when you do your holiday shopping. For large items, skip bagging if you can.
2. **Look for the Energy Star.** Products with the Energy Star rating have met strict energy-efficiency standards, so they use less energy and save money. Energy Star rates an array of products, from light bulbs to TVs to large appliances.
3. **Buy recycled.** Items with recycled content help cut down on consumer waste. A wide variety of glassware, jewelry, paper products and even clothing is made with recycled materials.
4. **Think outside the box.** Instead of a gift that can break or wear out, give tickets to a concert, play or sports event. Present a coupon good for an evening of babysitting or knitting lessons.
5. **Be a green wrapper.** Most wrapping paper can't be recycled, so it ends up in the trash. Make your own wrapping paper from the Sunday comic pages, maps, catalog pages or brown paper bags. Wrap gifts in fabric and tie with

ribbon or lace. Or buy gift bags, tins or baskets and reuse them each year. According to the Sierra Club, if every family did this with just three presents, it would save enough paper to cover 45,000 football fields.

6. **Decorate with LED lights.** LED lights use 90 percent less energy than standard holiday lights, and they last longer, too. They may cost a little more up front, but they pay for themselves in a year or two.
7. **Recycle your tree.** Many cities have tree recycling during the holidays. Check with your local recycling program to find out about pick-up or drop-off options.
8. **Recycle old electronics.** You got the new cell phone you wished for. But now, what do you do with your old cell phone? Or the iPod that went through the wash, or the rechargeable battery that no longer holds a charge? Recycle them. Recyclers recover millions of pounds of copper and precious metals from electronics every year. Recycling cuts pollution created by making new products, conserves resources and keeps hazardous materials out of landfills.

### To recycle consumer electronics:

- Drop them off at local stores. Best Buy, Office Depot, Staples and other large retailers provide drop boxes for old cell phones, PDAs, rechargeable batteries and other items.
- Return them to manufacturers. Many provide mail-in or drop-off recycling for used electronics, including HP, Palm, Verizon, AT&T and Nokia. Some will take larger items such as TVs and computers, even ones made by other manufacturers.
- Donate them. Some schools have electronics recycling programs that raise money for activities. Check with your local school district to find out if a school in your area has a program.

To learn more about electronics recycling (eCycling), go to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Web site at [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov) and type "ecycling" in the search box.

Lila Havens, Staff Writer  
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# Holiday Safety Tips

Here's how to keep your family safe while celebrating the holiday season.

With another holiday season fast approaching, many of us look forward to family traditions and holiday parties. A little added caution can ensure that your holidays remain safe and healthy. Keep in mind the following tips while planning your holiday season this year.

## Christmas tree and decorations

- **Make sure that the tree you buy is fresh.** If possible, cut the tree down yourself. Many tree farms let you tag a tree ahead of time and have it cut down on the day you take it home. A tree that is fresh will not lose many of its needles when shaken. Give the tree the "shake test" before you buy it. Find another if the needles are dry and falling off. The trunk of a fresh tree is sticky with resin and should not feel dry to the touch.
- **Be sure that your tree is stable** and won't fall over and injure a small child or pet. Use rope or heavy string to secure the tree if needed. Place it so that it's not blocking doorways, stairs or other exits.
- **Keep your tree away from fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, wall furnaces and heaters.** Never use lit candles to decorate your tree.
- **Beware of decorations that could be toxic.** Plants like mistletoe and holly berries can be poisonous to kids and pets. Old tinsel may contain lead. Get rid of it if you are not sure what it's made of.
- **Don't let your pet drink stagnant Christmas tree water.** It's a breeding ground for bacteria.
- **Water the tree daily.** Live trees dry out quickly in heated homes. Dispose of a live tree when the needles start falling off in large quantities.

## Artificial lights and decorations

- **Buy only lights that bear a UL mark.** It means engineers have tested samples for fire and shock hazards. Lights with the green holographic UL label are for indoor use. A red

UL mark means the lights can be used either inside or out.

- **Before stringing the lights on the tree, make sure they are in working order.** Discard any lights that have frayed wires or broken sockets. Don't use more than three standard-size sets of lights per extension cord or you may overload electrical circuits.
- **Turn off all tree lights when you are away or in bed.** The lights could short out and start a fire. Try putting the lights on a timer to go off at bedtime.
- **Take down outdoor lighting when the holiday season is finished.** Lighting should not be exposed to outside elements for long periods of time.

## Using a fireplace

- **Before using your fireplace, remove all hazards.** This includes decorations and ornaments on the mantle that may be hanging too close to the fire. Also, your tree should be nowhere near the fire.
- **Check to see if your chimney needs cleaning.** Once you're ready, make sure the flue is open. The fireplace opening should be completely covered by a screen, too.
- **Never burn anything but wood in your fireplace.** Wrappings and evergreen branches can burn very quickly, throwing off sparks and burning debris.
- **Have a working fire extinguisher in your home, and make sure your family members know how to use it.** Also, make the holiday season your regular time to check your smoke detectors.

Diane Griffith, Staff Writer  
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# How to Cope When Illness Doesn't Take a Holiday Break

## Stress-relieving tips may help young and old alike

Holidays can bring stress as well as joy, which can be a particular concern for people managing a serious illness.

But Dr. Michelle Riba, associate chairwoman for integrated medicine and psychiatric services at the University of Michigan Health System, said there are ways to avoid and manage stress that might be helpful. Her suggestions, offered in a news release from the university, include:

- **Incorporating a healthy attitude.** Do your best to maintain some routines, such as proper diet and exercise, even with the interruptions of social events and family gatherings. This is especially important for children, so parents should make sure they get appropriate amounts of sleep, food and drink as well as TV and computer time.

- **Remembering to take medications.** And be sure to pack medications in carry-on luggage when flying. If necessary, contact the airline before heading out to make sure your medication passes security regulations and can be taken on board.
- **Keeping medical appointments.** Whether it's a routine checkup or an appointment for a serious illness, these are important. Wellness visits can help prevent many injuries and illnesses. If cost is an issue, many hospitals have funding for people in need of money to pay for medications and hospital or doctor visits.
- **Setting limits.** Set a limit for gift-giving or gift costs with family and friends.

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## Take the Holiday to the Hospital

### Sharing a favorite ritual might ease a friend or family member's stay

If a family member or friend is in the hospital over the holidays, you can help cheer them up by bringing a bit of Christmas from home.

'Being in the hospital, away from family and festivities, can be a bit unnerving and sad for most people,' Denice Foose, a chaplain at The Methodist Hospital in Houston, said in a hospital news release. 'Anytime you can bring a holiday ritual into a patient's room, whether it's writing Christmas cards or reading from a favorite holiday story, it can make it feel more like home and make it easier on everyone.'

Writing down or discussing feelings about the situation might also be helpful.

'Some family members might be upset they have to spend the holidays at the hospital, and patients might feel guilty about it,' Foose said. 'Talking about these feelings will let everyone know how they feel about the situation and, in most cases, will ease tensions and make for a happier holiday.'

Giving can help everyone feel better. Something as simple as a smile from a family member to another patient, or from a patient to a hospital employee who has to work the holiday, can boost spirits.

'People begin to realize that material things are not what matters at the holidays, but instead the health and well-being of family members,' Foose said. 'Saying little things like, 'Is there anything I can do?' works wonders for the patient and loved ones, whether they are giving or receiving.'

She offered some other suggestions for easing the difficulty of a holiday hospital stay:

- Find a holiday special on television and watch it as a family, like you would at home.
- If family members can't make it to the hospital, patients can reach out to volunteers for comfort and companionship.

The American Geriatrics Society has tips for beating the holiday blues, [http://www.healthinaging.org/public\\_education/holiday\\_blues.php](http://www.healthinaging.org/public_education/holiday_blues.php).

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